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STATE URGES PUBLIC TO GET THE FACTS ON BIRD FLU
Television Movie May Cause Undue Alarm

The recent airing of a made-for-television film about an outbreak of Avian Influenza (bird flu) may cause some viewers undue alarm. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources wants to ensure that viewers keep this disease in perspective, and understand what the real risks are.

“This movie was science fiction. Reality isn’t so dramatic or frightening,” said Douglas Gillespie, Commissioner of the MA Department of Agricultural Resources. “People should be aware of Avian Influenza and pay attention to the advice government agencies give and to precautions that should be taken. At present, the risk to people in Massachusetts is very, very low.”

Some facts pertinent to the risk of Avian Influenza:

- There are many strains of Avian Influenza. Most are specific to birds and pose no danger to people. The strain scientists are currently concerned with is H5N1.
- H5N1 has never been found in North or South America.
- People do not easily contract H5N1. The only people who have contracted Avian Influenza have been individuals with direct and heavy exposure to poultry – namely people who work on poultry farms and people who actually live with or in very close proximity to domestic birds.
- There are no documented cases of H5N1 being transmitted between people. So far it has only been shown to be transmitted between infected birds

The concern is that H5N1 may mutate to a form of the virus that is more easily caught by people, and spread between people. Viruses do mutate and this is a legitimate concern. Nonetheless, it remains a theoretical concern.

The Department of Agricultural Resources has been doing testing and surveillance of thousands of birds in Massachusetts for Avian Influenza in domestic birds since 1983. In response to increased concerns with H5N1, DAR and other state and federal partners have increased testing and surveillance of wild and domestic bird populations.

For more information about Avian Influenza please visit the following USDA website:

www.pandemicflu.gov

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?navtype=SU&navid=AVIAN_INFLUENZA

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?navid=AI_FACTSHEETS&parentnav=AVIAN_INFLUENZA&navtype=RT

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